# REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

Highlights from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

































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MISSION STATEMENT THE LOS ANGELES

#### A MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY



Los Angeles County District Attorney

Joshie Racer

s your District Attorney, I am dedicated to protecting our community while also building a solid foundation to support our changing criminal justice landscape.

My approach to public safety is influenced by my life's lessons.

I was born in Los Angeles and grew up in a neighborhood where gangs and gunfire were part of our daily existence.

Just walking to and from Dorsey High School each day, I had to learn to be aware of my surroundings and be ready to respond to danger at any given time.

In fact, those threats were real. After I left home, my father was shot in the leg while cutting the grass because he dared to remove gang graffiti from outside our home.

The high incidents of violent crime deeply affected me and my family. I went to law school to make a difference. To make Los Angeles County safer.

Public safety is and always will be my top priority.

As the county's top prosecutor, I have a duty to crime victims and to our community.

A reduction in violent crime in recent years, however, has given us a window of opportunity to look back and evaluate every aspect of our criminal justice system.

I have a history of embracing innovative justice. I established the office's first Conviction Review Unit and have supported many alternatives to incarceration.

For nearly two decades, I led efforts in the District Attorney's Office to address nonviolent crime by diverting low-level offenders out of the criminal justice system. We have successfully moved military veterans, mothers with small children and now people living with mental illness out of our jails and prisons and into programs where they could get help.

My office has been responsive to the will of the people. New legislation and ballot initiatives have created a major shift in the work of a prosecutor.

Nearly a quarter of my office's resources were dedicated to post-

conviction issues. My attorneys have reviewed thousands of closed cases to determine whether those convicted of certain crimes should be resentenced or have their criminal records wiped clean.

In each and every case, we have a legal and moral obligation to make sure that those who benefit from these changes in state law do not return to our community and victimize others.

That requires a careful and time-consuming review of each person's criminal history – including the facts of the original case if the person pleaded to a lower charge and whether they have committed additional crimes while incarcerated.

Implementing these important criminal justice reforms requires a thoughtful and even-handed approach so that these difficult decisions do not result in tragedy for any family.

I thank the residents of Los Angeles County for trusting me to lead the nation's largest local prosecutorial office. I look forward to continuing our work on these vital criminal justice issues.

#### TASK FORCE LOOKS AT SEX ABUSE IN ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

In response to widespread allegations of sexual abuse in the entertainment industry, District Attorney Jackie Lacey in November 2017 established a task force of specially trained prosecutors to evaluate cases referred to her office for criminal prosecution.

Over the next 13 months, the task force worked closely with local law enforcement personnel to review 36 allegations of sexual abuse involving 22 entertainment figures. No cases had been filed.

The task force shed light on the difficult job of sex crimes prosecutors.

Allegations of rape, sexual assault and the sexual abuse of children were reviewed for filing consideration by deputy district attorneys assigned to the Sex Crimes Division.

More than 1,000 cases were presented to about 20 prosecutors in the Sex Crimes Division in 2017 and 2018. Three out of four of those cases were declined for filing because there was insufficient evidence or a lack of cooperation by victims and witnesses.

About 20 deputy district attorneys assigned to the Sex Crimes Division reviewed more than 1,000 cases in



2017 and 2018. Three out of four of those cases were declined for filing due to a lack of evidence or a lack of cooperation by victims and witnesses.

There were several reasons why these cases were some of the most challenging to prosecute. Many lacked corroborating evidence because the victim was the only witness to the crime. Drugs and alcohol often were involved. Or the suspect insisted the encounter was consensual.

When a relative was the perpetrator, some child victims of assault recanted their allegations – sometimes under pressure from other family members dependent on the perpetrator for financial support.

Victims, particularly those entrenched in human sex trafficking, sometimes broke off contact with prosecutors and could not be found.

"There was sometimes fear by victims that they would not be believed," said Christina Buckley, head deputy district attorney of the Sex Crimes Division.

Successful sex crime cases typically involved a combination of factors, such as the victim reporting the crime quickly to authorities, cooperative witnesses and the presence of physical evidence, including DNA.

When criminal charges were filed, the vast majority of these cases ended with convictions.

#### New Laws Support Enforcement, Child Victims

In an effort to better track the most dangerous offenders, the District Attorney's Office sponsored legislation that created a three-tier sex offender registry.

The new legislation allowed law enforcement agencies to dedicate more resources to monitoring the most violent, high-risk sex offenders returned to the community.

The tiers were based on the seriousness of the crime and the risk of re-offending.

Violent, high-risk offenders continued to register with local law enforcement agencies for life. Low-level misdemeanor offenders were required to register for 10 years. An additional tier included all other offenders and required registration for 20 years.

The office also sponsored a bill aimed at reducing the trauma of sexual abuse victims under the age of 11.

Under the new law, when sexual abuse was committed in multiple counties, the case could be tried in any jurisdiction where one of the offenses occurred.

This measure prevented vulnerable child witnesses from having to repeat their testimony in different jurisdictions and resulted in the more efficient prosecution of child molestation cases.

#### CHILD DEATH, ABUSE CASES SPUR PREVENTION, EDUCATION EFFORTS

he District Attorney's Office prosecuted heart-wrenching crimes against children, including some who were harmed by a parent, and led efforts designed to prevent these crimes in the future and improve investigations.

In one case, a mother, Heather Maxine Barron, and her boyfriend, Kareem Ernesto Leiva, were charged in June 2018 with the torture and murder of her 10-year-old son, Anthony Avalos, in Lancaster. They each pleaded not guilty to the charges and were awaiting trial.

That same month, another mother, Pearl Sinthia Fernandez, was sentenced to life in state prison without the possibility of parole in the 2013 torture and murder of her 8-year-old son, Gabriel Fernandez, in Palmdale. The mother's boyfriend, Isauro Aguirre, was sentenced to death.

In August 2017, Aramazd Andressian Sr. was sentenced to 25 years to life in state prison for killing his 5-year-old son, Aramazd Andressian Jr., whose body was found in Santa Barbara County more than two months after he allegedly vanished from a South Pasadena park.

These and other horrific cases focused renewed attention on child abuse prevention.

District Attorney Jackie Lacey and other county officials launched a public education campaign to highlight Child Abuse Prevention Month in April 2018. As part of the "No Hitters" campaign, a video featuring District Attorney Lacey and Sheriff Jim McDonnell premiered during a presentation before a Dodgers home game (pictured top right).

"The well-being of children in our community depends on each of us, and, if ever we believe a child is at risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect, it is our responsibility to alert authorities," District Attorney Lacey said.

To make sure first responders had the tools needed to investigate child abuse cases, the office held two daylong training sessions that brought together hundreds of prosecutors, law enforcement personnel, social workers and Department of Children and Family Services staff.

A summit in June 2017 focused on training users of the enhanced countywide Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting System. The next fall, the Child Abuse Summit featured sessions on identifying medical evidence and rescuing children from human trafficking.



#### FORMS OF CHILD ABUSE

#### PHYSICAL ABUSE



The infliction of physical injury on a child that results in a bruise, burn, cut, abrasion, fracture or internal injury.

#### SEXUAL ABUSE



The sexual assault or exploitation of a minor. It includes touching and forcing a child to sexually touch the perpetrator's body. Encouraging a child to engage in sexual activity or poses also constitutes sexual abuse.

#### **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**



Verbal assaults, humiliation, threats, and ridicule that causes emotional injury to a child, sometimes resulting in psychological, behavioral and cognitive disorders.

#### **NEGLECT**



When a guardian fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care, endangering or harming the child's health or well-being.

#### Trio Charged in Deadly 1993 Westlake Apartment Fire

ore than two decades after seven children and three women were killed in an arson fire at a Westlake apartment building, two alleged gang members and a woman were charged with murder.

It was one of the deadliest arson fires in Los Angeles County history. Ramiro Valerio, Joseph Monge and Johanna Lopez each were charged in February 2017 with 12 counts of murder with the special circumstance allegations of multiple murders and murder in the commission of an arson. They pleaded not guilty and were awaiting trial.

Prosecutors said the trio caused the fire because they were upset when the manager of the Burlington apartment complex and others wanted to stop drug deals in the building.

The apartment manager was moving furniture on May 3, 1993, when a mattress that was in a hallway was set on fire and smoke from the flames spread throughout the complex.

Seven children and three women, two of whom were pregnant, died from smoke inhalation. Dozens of others were injured.

If convicted as charged, the three defendants faced a possible maximum sentence of life in state prison without the possibility of parole.



#### Former Music Producer 'Suge' Knight Sentenced in Fatal Hit-and-Run

The courtroom saga of Marion "Suge" Knight ended in October 2018 when the former rap music mogul was sentenced to 28 years in state prison for running over a man with his truck and killing him in a Compton restaurant parking lot.



The sentence was handed down after Knight pleaded no contest to one count of voluntary manslaughter and admitted a special allegation that he used a deadly weapon, a truck.

On Jan. 29, 2015, an altercation occurred outside of a restaurant during the filming of the movie, "Straight Outta Compton," and Knight ran over two men with his truck. Terry Carter, 55, was killed and the other man was injured. Knight fled the scene and was later arrested.

While Knight was awaiting trial, his girlfriend, Toilin

Kelly, pleaded no contest to violating a court order by selling video evidence of the fatal hit-and-run to TMZ, the celebrity news website, for \$55,000. She was sentenced to three years in county jail.

Kelly's business partner, Mark Blankenship, also faced conspiracy charges for his alleged role in selling the evidence, which the court placed under a protective order, meaning it could not be legally distributed beyond the parties in the criminal case. He pleaded not guilty to the charges and was awaiting trial.

In addition, two of Knight's former attorneys, Matthew Fletcher and Thaddeus Culpepper, were indicted in March 2018 on conspiracy charges for allegedly trying to bribe potential witnesses and circumvent the criminal justice system in hopes of freeing their one-time client. They each pleaded not guilty and also were awaiting trial on the charges.

#### SECURITY GUARD CHARGED IN HOLLYWOOD PHARMACY KILLING

security guard at a pharmacy in Hollywood was charged with killing a man he suspected of shoplifting.

Donald Vincent Ciota II, of Covina, faced one count of murder with an allegation that he used a firearm as a deadly and dangerous weapon.

ment on Dec. 31, 2018.

The charges stemmed from a Dec. 2, 2018, incident in which Ciota confronted 21-year-old Jonathan Hart inside a pharmacy at Sunset Boulevard and Vine Street, prosecutors said.

A physical altercation ensued.

Ciota pleaded not guilty at arraign- According to prosecutors, Ciota pulled out his firearm and allegedly shot Hart in the back as he ran away.

> The defendant faced a possible maximum sentence of 50 years to life in state prison if convicted as charged.

#### In Remembrance



Keith Boyer 1964-2017



Greggory Casillas 1988-2018



Christopher Cortijo 1963-2014



Roberto Carlos Sanchez 1981-2014

#### PROSECUTING ATTACKS ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

he Crimes Against Peace
Officers Section (CAPOS)
prosecuted cases in which law
enforcement officers were injured or
killed on the job.

As part of their duties, deputy district attorneys assigned to the section responded immediately to these crime scenes.

"It definitely makes me realize how dangerous their job is," said Darren Levine, head deputy district attorney of the Target Crimes Division, which includes CAPOS.

When the section was created, the office and law enforcement agencies struck an agreement that allowed district attorney personnel to roll out to the scene and assist in the drafting of search warrants and provide other legal advice.

In 2017 and 2018, capital murder cases were filed against two defendants charged in killing police officers.

Whittier Police Officer Keith Boyer, 53, was killed and Officer Patrick Hazell was wounded on Feb. 20, 2017.

Michael Christopher Mejia was charged with two counts of murder and one count of attempted murder. He was accused of fatally shooting his cousin and then crashing his car. When officers arrived at the scene, he allegedly opened fire on them.

Pomona Police Officer Greggory

Casillas, 30, was killed and another officer was wounded on March 9, 2018.

Isaias De Jesus Valencia was charged with one count of murder and seven counts of attempted murder for allegedly opening fire on a group of Pomona police officers after leading them on a chase and barricading himself inside an apartment complex.

Mejia and Valencia each pleaded not guilty to the charges and were awaiting trial.

Attorneys assigned to the section also closed the cases of two other fallen officers.

Los Angeles Police Officer Christopher Cortijo, 51, was struck by an SUV while riding his motorcycle and died four days later on April 9, 2014.

Qaneak Shaney Cobb was sentenced to 15 years to life in state prison in October 2017 after pleading no contest to second-degree murder.

Los Angeles Police Officer Roberto Carlos Sanchez, 32, was killed and his partner was seriously injured during a May 3, 2014, crash with an SUV.

The SUV driver, Mynor Enrique Varela, was sentenced to life in state prison without the possibility of parole in October 2018 after a jury found him guilty of one count each of seconddegree murder and gross vehicular manslaughter.

#### VIDEO ILLUMINATES FINDINGS IN OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTING

Por the first time, the District Attorney's Office in March 2018 released video evidence collected as part of its extensive investigation into an officer-involved shooting.

The video came from an officer's body camera and surveillance cameras in the vicinity.

The images supported the office's decision to decline to file criminal charges against a former Los Angeles police officer who shot and killed a homeless man during a May 2015 altercation in Venice.

Video became increasingly available, producing new sources of evidence in the review of possible criminal wrongdoing throughout the office, from residential burglaries to murder. Its use, however, was most noted in officer-involved shootings.

In 2018, the 14 prosecutors and nine investigators assigned to the Justice System Integrity Division rolled out to the scenes of 64 officer-involved shootings and 12 in-custody deaths to begin their independent reviews of the incidents. They did the same for 82 officer-involved shootings and six in-custody deaths in 2017.

In addition to those cases, the division's prosecutors also reviewed criminal allegations against attorneys, law enforcement employees and other justice-system professionals.

There were 242 such complaints reviewed in 2018 and 274 in 2017.

Deputy district attorneys assigned to the division filed a total of 31 criminal cases in 2017 and 2018, including murder, manslaughter, sexual assault and stalking.

They referred as many as 50 of these cases to other units within the office each year for possible prosecution because the allegation involved misdemeanor conduct or was not related to the suspect's job. Addition-





Video from an officer's body camera (above) and a security camera (below) were used to determine whether to file criminal charges against the officer in a fatal May 2015 altercation with a homeless man.

ally, as many as 25 of the cases were referred each year to city prosecutors for misdemeanor filing consideration.

In one case filed in March 2017, Supervising Probation Officer Sergio Cano and Deputy Probation Officers Timothy Boundy and Carlos Portillo were charged with assault for their alleged roles in attacks on teen inmates at Sylmar Juvenile Hall. They pleaded not guilty to the charges and were awaiting trial.

Another significant case ended in

February 2018 with two Los Angeles police officers, James Nichols and Luis Valenzuela, each being sentenced to 25 years in state prison for sexually assaulting four women while on duty.

And, in June 2018, prosecutors filed obstruction of justice charges against David Smith, a retired sheriff's lieutenant, for allegedly tipping off a massage parlor employee about upcoming raids in exchange for sexual favors or gifts. He pleaded not guilty and was awaiting trial.

#### PUBLIC INTEGRITY CASES INVOLVE CRIMINAL, CIVIL REMEDIES

hen a court ruled in May 2018 that Carson Mayor Albert Robles violated state law by simultaneously holding two incompatible offices, it marked a major victory for government accountability and affirmed the use of a new legal strategy to fight public corruption.

Prosecutors assigned to the office's Public Integrity Division filed a civil lawsuit asking a judge to determine whether the mayor was breaking state law by also serving as a director of the Water Replenishment District of Southern California.

The judge ordered Robles to step down from the water district.

"The residents of Los Angeles County have the right to expect that their elected and appointed officials will carry out their duties in a lawful, ethical and professional manner," said Head Deputy District Attorney Alan Yochelson of the Public Integrity Division.

The 10 attorneys and 14 investigators assigned to the division reviewed about 200 complaints per year in 2017 and 2018 that included allegations that public employees accepted bribes and that public funds were misused, sometimes at the hands of government contractors.

They also prosecuted several highprofile public corruption cases.

In one of the division's biggest cases, three former executives of the Los Angeles nonprofit Chicana Service Action Center pleaded guilty in August 2017 to embezzling and misappropriating millions of dollars in public funds. The center provided counseling and job training for underserved clients through contracts with local social service agencies.

Sophia Esparza, the former chief executive, received the longest

sentence, six years in state prison.

Meanwhile, Refugio Rodriguez, former president of the Los Angeles Unified School District board, and his cousin, Elizabeth Tinajero Melendrez, pleaded guilty to illegally reimbursing thousands of dollars to donors that he had claimed in a campaign filing form in July 2018. Rodriguez resigned from the school board and was sentenced to three years of probation and 60 days of community service.

Prosecutors also charged former Centinela Valley Union High School District Superintendent Jose A. Fernandez in August 2017 with conflict of interest, misappropriation of public funds, grand theft and embezzlement in connection with a scheme to unlawfully advance his financial interests. He pleaded not guilty to the charges and was awaiting trial.

#### SHERIFF'S DEPUTY CHARGED WITH VOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER

Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputy was charged with voluntary manslaughter in December 2018 for an on-duty fatal shooting of an unarmed motorist at a gas station in Norwalk.

Luke Liu faced one count of voluntary manslaughter and a special allegation that he personally and intentionally discharged a firearm that caused death to the victim.

District Attorney Jackie Lacey said the manslaughter charge was warranted because the use of force was not reasonable – a critical factor in determining whether an officer would be charged for shooting someone.

"We believe the deputy's use of deadly force was unjustified and unreasonable under the circumstances," District Attorney Lacey said. This was the first time that a law enforcement officer was charged in Los Angeles County for an on-duty shooting since 2000.

The Norwalk incident occurred on Feb. 24, 2016, when Liu was on patrol on Alondra Boulevard, prosecutors from the office's Justice System Integrity Division said. Liu allegedly spotted a vehicle he believed may have been stolen and pulled up behind it.

Liu approached and stood near the driver's side door, according to prosecutors. He next went to the rear of the car.

When Liu returned to the driver's side door, Francisco Garcia, 26, began to drive away at approximately 5 miles per hour, prosecutors said. Liu allegedly drew his service weapon, ran alongside the car and fired seven shots at Garcia, who was struck four times

and killed.

The incident, a portion of which was captured on video by bystanders, lasted about 20 seconds.

"There is an inherent danger for law enforcement officers every time they put on the uniform. We applaud their dedication and bravery to make split-second decisions in potentially life-threatening situations," District Attorney Lacey said. "But we also must hold them accountable when their conduct is unlawful."

Liu, who pleaded not guilty at a Dec. 11, 2018, hearing, faced a possible maximum sentence of 21 years in state prison if convicted as charged.

#### Growing Cybercrime Threat Brings Innovative Prosecutions, Training

riminals from all backgrounds were finding new ways to use an increasingly connected and technology-reliant world to target individuals, businesses, government agencies and organizations.

The District Attorney's Office responded by doubling the number of prosecutors in its Cyber Crime Division since 2008 from six to 12.

While identity theft remained one of the most common cybercrimes, the division also reviewed other types of cases, including email scams targeting businesses, extortion, money laundering, computer intrusion and online child pornography and exploitation.

In November 2017, a criminal investigation by the County Cyber Investigation Response Team led to the arrest of Oriyomi Sadiq Aloba, the alleged mastermind behind a five-day email-phishing attack targeting Los Angeles



More than 200 prosecutors, investigators and other law enforcement personnel attended the office's Cyber Crime Symposium on Oct. 17, 2018.

County Superior Court email accounts. More than 500 court employees received email messages designed to trick them into revealing their account credentials.

Businesses also were targets of cyberattacks.

In March 2018, the owner of a Van Nuys cargo logistics business pleaded guilty in a wire fraud scheme and was sentenced to 10 years in state prison. Ifeoma Nkwocha's company acted as a conduit to receive more than \$1.75 million in proceeds fraudulently obtained from business victims. Nkwocha's company disbursed the money via wire transfers and withdrawals.

As part of its prosecutions,

the District Attorney's Office recovered nearly \$75 million for more than 16,000 victims of financial cybercrimes in 2017 and 2018.

Prosecuting child pornography and predation remained a high priority. The office took a lead in training law enforcement personnel on how to build cases and secure convictions against those who exploit children over the internet.

As a result of these efforts, the number of child exploitation arrests doubled.

More than 180 suspected child predators were arrested in May 2017 as part of "Operation Broken Heart" conducted by the Los Angeles Regional Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, which included the District Attorney's Office.

One of the suspects, Cushqader Warren, a 22-year-old man, was sentenced in July 2017 to three years and eight months in state prison for luring a young boy into performing sexually explicit acts online in exchange for video gaming cards.

# CONSUMER PROSECUTORS TARGET IMMIGRATION SCAMS, PATIENT DUMPING AND OTHER ILLEGAL PRACTICES

launched a new unit in 2017 dedicated to prosecuting scam artists engaged in immigration fraud and the unlawful practice of law.

"Everyone – regardless of their immigration status – deserves to be protected against crime and to receive justice when they have been victimized," District Attorney Lacey said.

The Notario Fraud Unit was established with two full-time deputy district attorneys and an investigator. Those positions were funded by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors with proceeds from a 2016 settlement with Wells Fargo.

"Notario" was a word often used

interchangeably with "attorney" in some Latin American countries. In California, it was illegal for immigration consultants to call themselves "notarios" because it gave the false impression that they were licensed attorneys.

Eight major cases involving 300 victims who lost a total of \$3 million to immigration fraud were prosecuted in 2017 and 2018.

Gregory Chavez was sentenced to 10 years in county jail and five years of mandatory supervision for posing as a law enforcement officer and promising the families of immigration detainees that he could get their loved ones out of custody.

Dalila Moreno was sentenced to nine years in county jail and three years of mandatory supervision for defrauding more than 30 people out of about \$300,000 through her home-based immigration services business.

In addition to immigration fraud, the 10 deputy district attorneys assigned to the Consumer Protection Division prosecuted a variety of cases aimed at safeguarding customers from financial losses caused by deception and unlawful business practices.

District Attorney Lacey and Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer settled a civil lawsuit against Silver Lake Medical Center in July 2018 over allegations of homeless patient dumping. The settlement established new protocols at the hospital for discharging homeless patients and directed the facility to spend \$550,000 to fund a new Homeless Patient Assistance Program.

Two months later, the office reached a \$9 million settlement with one of the world's largest third-party debt collection companies in a civil lawsuit that alleged illegal phonecalling practices. Allied Interstate LLC and its parent company iQor Holdings Inc. agreed to curb harassing robocalls and other violations as part of the settlement.

District Attorney Jackie Lacey and Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer announced the settlement over allegations of homeless patient dumping.





Fraud Alert videos were released twice a month on the District Attorney's website and social media channels.







And the state of t

Once a month, nearly 6,000 Fraud Alert flyers were printed and distributed to senior centers and other public locations.



# FRAUD ALERTS REACH CONSUMERS TO PREVENT SCAMS

ne of District Attorney Jackie
Lacey's top priorities was
safeguarding seniors from
financial crimes. In addition to
aggressive prosecution, she led the
effort to reduce the number of seniors
victimized by financial scams through
outreach and education.

The District Attorney's Office began publishing twice-monthly Fraud Alerts in May 2015 to warn the public about common consumer fraud schemes. Videos featuring deputy district attorneys from the Bureau of Fraud and Corruption Prosecutions helped illustrate scams. Simple tips were provided to help consumers avoid becoming victims.

Fraud Alerts were released on the second and fourth Friday of each month. Many focused on scams that targeted seniors, such as Medicare rip-offs and counterfeit drug scams.

They were distributed through news releases to local media, whose coverage helped spread the word about prevalent scams affecting Los Angeles County. They also were posted on the office's website and on Twitter and Instagram using #FraudFriday.

To reach seniors who might not be able to access the information online,

nearly 6,000 Fraud Alerts were printed each month and distributed to more than 100 senior centers and other locations throughout the county.

The office also worked with the Los Angeles County Public Library and other nonprofit and governmental agencies to distribute more than 9,000 informational pamphlets titled "Safeguarding Your Future" in English and Spanish in 2017 and 2018.

These efforts to protect seniors were recognized by the Peace Officers Association of Los Angeles County in 2018 with its Centurion Award for Excellence in Special Investigations.

# PROJECT LEAD TURNS 25 WITH RECORD PARTICIPATION, RAVE REVIEWS

he 2017-2018 school year marked the 25th anniversary of Project LEAD, the District Attorney's premier law-related education program for fifthgraders.

Since its inception, Project LEAD has placed 1,059 deputy district attorneys, investigators and other professionals in 917 classrooms in 197 schools.

More than 37,000 students have completed the 20-week Project LEAD curriculum since 1993.

During that time, Project LEAD facilitators volunteered an estimated 52,800 hours in classrooms, teaching students about the criminal justice system and the importance of making good decisions.

"Trying to instill good civic values, stopping bullying and keeping these kids off drugs is very rewarding," said Deputy District Attorney Michael DeRose, a facilitator at Patrick Henry Elementary School in Long Beach.

Participation doubled under District Attorney Jackie Lacey, who taught Project LEAD at Lorena Street Elementary School in Boyle Heights for five years and encouraged others to do so.

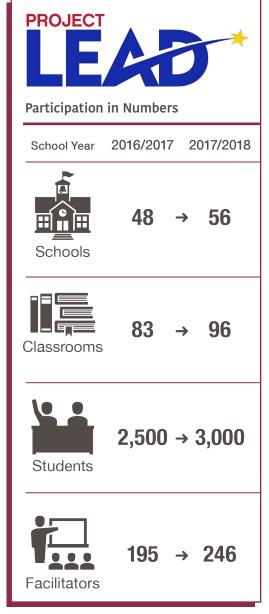
"Through Project LEAD, you can make a difference in the lives of young people," District Attorney Lacey told her staff in July 2018. "Each Project LEAD lesson is an opportunity to nurture and guide our next generation."

In the 2017-2018 school year, there were 246 volunteer facilitators – up from 104 in 2012 – assigned to 96 classrooms at 56 schools throughout Los Angeles County. They reached approximately 3,000 fifth-graders.

Project LEAD received rave reviews from students, teachers and staff.

"The attorneys presented themselves as true role models who cared about the students," said teacher Raquel Burbank of Lockwood Avenue Elementary in Hollywood. "I do believe that my students' lives have been changed for the better."





Castelar Elementary School students (left) participated in Project LEAD facilitated by Deputy District Attorney Irene Lee (below).



#### MEET SKIPPY, NORA AND LENNOX

n 2017, the District Attorney's Office created its first K-9 Unit dedicated to assisting and comforting crime victims and witnesses.

By the end of 2018, there were three facility dogs in service: Skippy and Nora, both yellow Labrador retrievers; and Lennox, a black Labrador retriever.

Their primary job was to offer a sense of security and nonjudgmental emotional support to crime victims and witnesses, particularly children, seniors and people with disabilities, while they went through the criminal justice process.

Facility dogs accompanied victims and witnesses inside the courtroom. Skippy sat in the witness box with a 6-year-old boy as he recalled watching his mother kill his great-grandmother. Nora comforted a mother who testified in the murder case of her 3-year-old.

The dogs also provided support to victims and witnesses when they met with deputy district attorneys to prepare for testimony in preliminary hearings and trials.

The K-9 Unit was called in to assist victims after the Oct. 1, 2017, mass shooting in Las Vegas, the fatal shooting of a store manager at the Trader Joe's in Silver Lake and the shooting deaths of 12 people, including Ventura County Sheriff's Sergeant Ronald Helus, at a Thousand Oaks nightclub on Nov. 7, 2018.

For eight days, Skippy and his handler, Victim Services Representative Ashley Meyers, were stationed mostly at the Las Vegas Convention Center, which served as the Family Assistance Center for those affected by the violence at the Route 91 Harvest Festival. They were joined by three other victim services representatives – Jenneifer Bobadilla, Gabriela Bailey-Juarez and Emyrene Coleman.









#### Bureau of Victim Services Celebrates 40th Anniversary

The District Attorney's Bureau of Victim Services celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2017 with a Recognition Walk and Jubilee.

On April 8, 2017, District
Attorney Jackie Lacey and Donna
Wills, director of the Bureau of
Victim Services, led the walk from
the Hall of Justice to Grand Park.
It was followed by the Jubilee,
during which District Attorney Lacey
recognized the late John Van de
Kamp for establishing the program
to assist victims during his tenure as
district attorney.



# VICTIMS BENEFIT FROM NEW RESTITUTION SYSTEM

n 2018, Los Angeles became the first county in California to collect restitution from county jail inmates and others sentenced to community supervision.

The system was created through a collaborative effort led by Deputy District Attorney Lydia Bodin, who served as special assistant for the Bureau of Victim Services.

Bodin drafted legislation authorizing the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and Probation Department to collect restitution from county jail inmates and others sentenced to mandatory supervision or post-release community supervision.

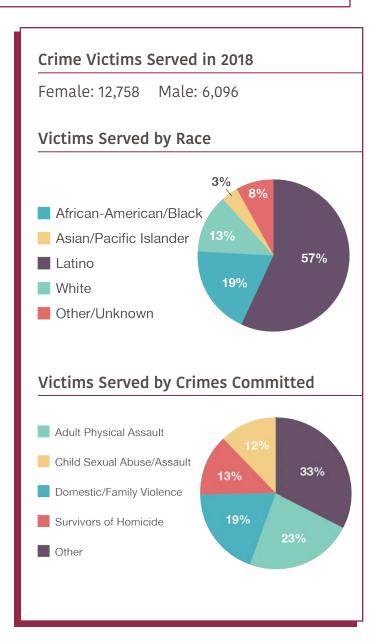
The bills addressed an issue that arose when Assembly Bill 109 transferred inmates from state prisons to county jails: Crime victims lost their ability to collect restitution.

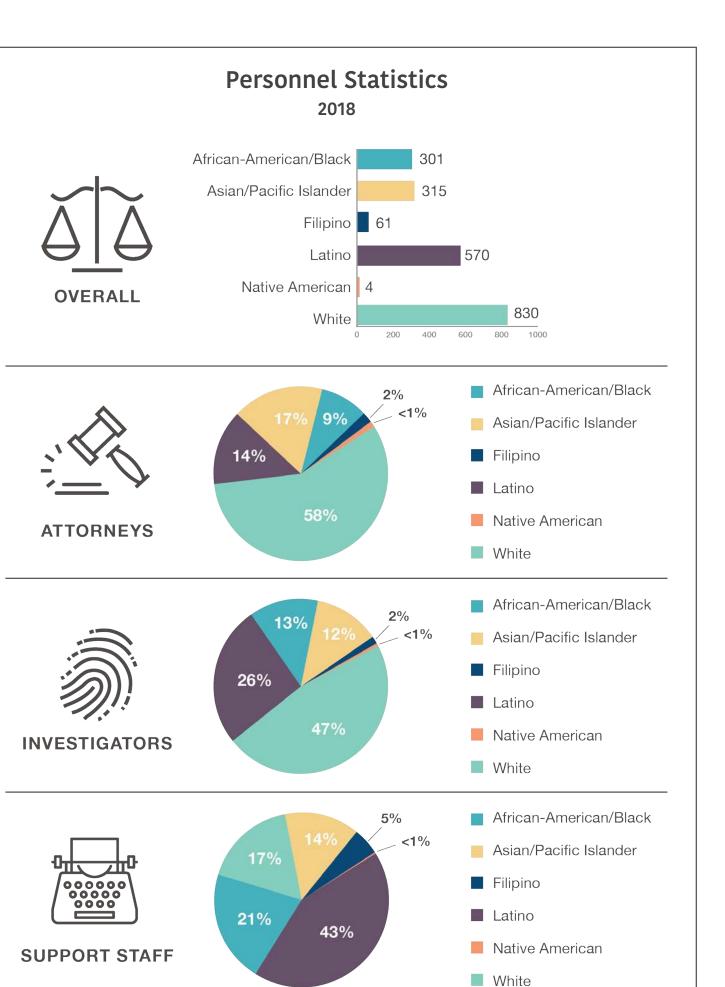
The state Constitution guaranteed crime victims the right to seek restitution from criminals who have harmed them.

"If not for this process, these victims would have to wait until the defendants were released from county jail before they could attempt any restitution collections," said Tracy Anderson, the Restitution Enhancement Program's supervising paralegal.

The program had 15 paralegals working to assist victims in obtaining court-ordered restitution. Restitution could cover a variety of financial burdens that victims incurred, including medical bills, lost wages, loss of property and funeral and burial costs.

Since 1986, the office has obtained more than 9,000 restitution orders totaling nearly \$226 million.





#### MANDATORY IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING BUILDS AWARENESS



n May 2017, the District Attorney's Office became the first Los Angeles County department to offer implicit bias training for its staff.

District Attorney Jackie Lacey was among the members of her management team who completed the office's first three-hour implicit bias training.

"The decisions made by our office not only affect people's lives but also their liberty," District Attorney Lacey said. "This kind of training will make us better at our jobs and help us to better serve our diverse community."

Five months later, the office held a mandatory Saturday Seminar titled "Becoming Conscious about Unconscious Bias" for prosecutors.

In October 2018, the training was required for support staff supervisors.

"These trainings build awareness that everyone in the office must

operate in a fair manner without allowing unconscious bias to affect their decision-making process," said Cynthia Nakao, the office's professional responsibility advisor, who chaired the curriculum development group.

The District Attorney's goal was to maintain an ongoing conversation about unconscious bias and its impact on the criminal justice system.

#### Leadership 101 for New Managers

New managers in the District Attorney's Office received leadership training in 2017 and 2018.

Assistant District Attorney for Special Operations Joseph Esposito and his special assistants, John Niedermann and Jane Creighton, created a three-hour leadership course titled "Leadership 101: Customer Service for Managers."

The class was designed to help new managers hone their leadership skills and learn how the

office interacts with other members of the criminal justice system, how to better communicate with the public and how to lead by example.

Fifty-three new legal managers completed the class.

"My goal," Esposito said, "is to expose them to ideas and concepts so they can be more effective leaders."

#### Gun Legislation Backed

In an ongoing effort to reduce violence in Los Angeles County, District Attorney Jackie Lacey and her office sponsored legislation to assist law enforcement personnel in keeping guns out of the hands of adults convicted of violent crimes as juveniles.

The office also was recognized for its work with police agencies to actively remove guns from criminal suspects ordered by the court to relinquish their weapons.

Senate Bill 1281 closed a potentially fatal gap in state law barring people convicted of certain crimes from owning guns. The law applied to some juvenile offenders. However, offenders' juvenile records were sealed, making prosecution under this law almost impossible.

The new law gave prosecutors access to sealed juvenile records to enforce illegal gun possession laws. It also delayed the destruction of juvenile court records for these offenders.

This was one of eight officesponsored bills that Gov. Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown Jr. signed into law in 2018.

Earlier that year, the National Association of Counties recognized the office's Firearm Relinquishment Program with its Achievement Award.

The project teamed deputy district attorneys from the Long Beach Branch Office with officers from the Long Beach and Signal Hill police departments.

The program's goal was to make sure that guns were safely removed from or surrendered by people arrested and subjected to written criminal protective orders.



#### NEW APPROACH TO CURB STREET RACING

he District Attorney's Office took innovative steps to make Los
Angeles County roads safer from reckless and impaired drivers.
To address new threats to public safety from the legalization of cannabis, the office established the DUI Training and Prosecution Section.
Prosecutors also used a pretrial diversion program to educate street racing spectators about its dangers.

The new section trained deputy district attorneys and law enforcement personnel to investigate and prosecute individuals driving under the influence of cannabis and other drugs and increased the number of drug recognition experts in the county.

"We in law enforcement must be prepared to aggressively investigate and prosecute vehicular deaths and injuries caused by reckless and impaired drivers," District Attorney Jackie Lacey said. "It is still a crime for any person to get behind the wheel while under the influence of drugs – whether legally obtained or not."

In Santa Clarita, where street racing was a deadly concern, prosecutors offered approximately 80 spectators, most 18 to 21 years old, an alternative to a criminal record.

They were cited on the misdemeanor charge of being a spectator at a street racing event as part of an undercover operation in a Castaic industrial park.

After review, prosecutors referred many of the spectators to the office's Pre-Filing Diversion Program, which was intended to maintain public safety while keeping low-level, nonviolent offenders out of the criminal justice system.

To avoid criminal charges, the spectators had to complete one of two 90-minute training sessions developed specifically for them by the California Highway Patrol. The training addressed street racing and impaired and distracted driving.

"We charged the offenders in court who were actively involved in illegal street racing, and we educated those who were passively involved," said Alisanne Scolnik, deputy-in-charge of the Santa Clarita Area Office.

#### COLLABORATIVE EFFORT SUPPORTS MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

istrict Attorney Jackie Lacey remained committed to keeping nonviolent offenders diagnosed with a mental illness out of the criminal justice system through community-based treatment and crisis intervention training for first responders.

Her office worked with other agencies to establish the Felony Incompetent to Stand Trial Community-Based Restoration Program in July 2018.

The program placed eligible county jail inmates, awaiting placement in a state hospital, into community-based group homes for mental health treatment designed to restore them to competency. Once restored to competency, they would be returned to court to face criminal charges.

It was a collaborative effort with the District Attorney's Office, the county Department of Health Services Office of Diversion and Reentry and the California Department of State Hospitals.

"It is my office's role to make sure that public safety remains paramount," District Attorney Lacey said. "This program achieves that in two ways: restoring the lives of people through treatment and making sure that serious, violent offenders remain in custody."

The number of felony defendants in county jail who had been declared incompetent to stand trial grew from 768 in 2015 to 2,262 in 2017, creating an acute shortage of state hospital beds that required them to remain in county

jail for prolonged periods of time.

In the first three months of the program, approximately 55 felony defendants entered group homes. The goal was to place as many as 150 people at any given time.

The felony program was modeled after the Misdemeanor Incompetent to Stand Trial Community-Based Restoration Program, which began in November 2015 and treated about 850 misdemeanor defendants in its first three years.

Meanwhile, the District Attorney's Office continued to train first responders to recognize and safely de-escalate incidents involving people in a mental health crisis.

More than 1,500 police officers and other first responders from 63 agencies completed the two-day Mental Health Awareness Training Program, administered by the office's Criminal Justice Institute, from 2016 to 2018.

The training received a Top Ten Award from the county's Quality and Productivity Commission in 2018 and a National Association of Counties award in 2017.

The training, which was certified by the California Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training, was a collaborative effort that included the county Department of Mental Health and the Los Angeles County Police Chiefs Association.

#### New Laws Focus on Services for Mentally Ill

As part of District Attorney Jackie Lacey's ongoing effort to improve how the criminal justice system interacts with people with a mental illness, her office sponsored legislation to support mental health diversion and provide much-needed services.

Senate Bill 237 granted law enforcement officers the legal authority to transport individuals experiencing a mental health crisis to a mental health treatment facility or hospital.

The 2017 law was designed to divert people in need of mental health treatment out of county jails and into appropriate facilities.

Senate Bill 931 amended the state's Lanterman-Petris-Short conservatorship law to specify that custody status cannot be used as the sole reason to postpone the psychiatric conservatorship evaluation process.

The 2018 law gave inmates with a mental illness the same access to services provided under a conservatorship. Previously, they could not apply for these services while incarcerated, creating a potentially deadly gap in services after they left jail.

#### COURAGEOUS CITIZEN AWARDS

hirty-nine men, women and children were honored with the District Attorney's Courageous Citizen Award in 2017 and 2018 for their heroic actions.

"Each of these individuals stepped into extremely difficult situations and remained dedicated to the pursuit of justice," District Attorney Jackie Lacey said. "Their actions were driven by a belief in doing the right thing, even when it meant putting themselves in harm's way to help another person." The awards commended individuals who acted with courage and at considerable personal risk to help a victim of crime, assist in the capture of a suspect or testify in the face of extraordinary pressures.

Award recipients were nominated by deputy district attorneys and others in the office. The awards were presented at regional luncheons hosted by local service organizations.

The award recipients were:

Nancy Arrowsmith-Hart, 20, Trevor Hart, 18, both of Lancaster – Led authorities to the man accused of killing a sheriff's deputy.

Angelica Hernandez, 25, Sergio Hernandez, 22, Javier Hernandez, 17, all of Duarte – Protected a woman from her husband, who was viciously beating her.

Michael Collier, 29, of Los Angeles, Sylvester June Board III, 44, of Long Beach – Stopped a hate crime attack on the beach.

**Patrick Connell**, 37, of Carlsbad – Interrupted an assault on a boy in a restaurant bathroom.

**Rebecca Madrigal**, 48, of Gardena – Aided a mother beaten by a stranger over a parking space.

**Timoteo Salomón Evora Vigil**, 17, of South El Monte – Helped solve his brother's murder.

**Douglas Randazzo**, 49, of Simi Valley – Tracked an animal abuser until police arrested him.

**Francisco Soria Diaz**, 48, of Rosemead – Chased and held a mugger for authorities.

**Ben A. Hobbs**, 53, of Lancaster, **Dominic Kalmeta**, 30, of Murrieta, **Brandon Fenoglio**, 25, of North Carolina, **Sherwin Santiago**, 33, of Connecticut – Assisted in the capture of a violent sexual predator.

Max Miller, 22, Elijah Lee Williams, 22, both of Los Angeles – Helped subdue an assailant.

**Jolie Wirth**, 19, of North Hills, **Augustine Lopez**, 48, of Panorama City – Rescued a 9-month-old girl left alone in a locked car.

**Steve Oseas**, 52, of Los Angeles – Chased and held a man who tried to mug a woman.

**Krisanto Paragas**, 30, of Los Angeles – Rescued a dog that its owner had thrown into a ravine.

Mark Ayala, 22, of Whittier, Brent Glonchak, 40, of Buena Park, Heidi Manzanares, 48, of Corona – Intervened in a domestic violence attack.

**Leo Richard Anicua**, 15, of Pacoima – Witnessed a sexual assault in a vehicle and wrote down detailed information that led authorities to the suspect.

**Tracy Richardson**, 55, of Los Angeles – Led police to a man who abused his dog.

**Frank Bañuelos**, 48 – Helped police apprehend a man driving a stolen truck.

**James Gutierrez**, 34, of Redlands – Distracted homeinvasion robbers to give his wife time to call police, ending a deadly crime spree.

**Richard Fredrick**, 70, of Detroit – Came to the aid of a sheriff's deputy being viciously attacked.

**Luz Arias**, 65, of Bellflower – Intervened to protect a man being hit with a golf club.

**Sylvia Reyna**, 44, of Bellflower – Distracted a man with a handgun until police arrived.

Jenny Unger, 40, of Pico Rivera, Alexandra Plascencia, 28, of Los Angeles, Veronica Gonzalez, 40, of Bellflower – Rescued a 3-year-old boy walking alone on a freeway onramp.

**Joshua Anderson**, 25, of Las Vegas – Led police to a man whose mobile phone contained child pornography.

**Daniel Ayard**, 23, of South Pasadena – Chased down a child molester until police arrived.

**Donald Shaw,** 71, of Studio City – Assisted a security guard being attacked at a supermarket.

**John R. Eldridge**, 63, of Lancaster – Helped the victim of a deadly gang beating.

#### November 2, 2017 - Northridge

Standing from left: Deputy District Attorneys Ranna Jahanshahi and Julie Kramer, District Attorney Jackie Lacey and Deputy District Attorneys Jon Hatami and Scott Yang. Seated from left: Honorees Max Miller, Elijah Lee Williams, Jolie Wirth and Ben A. Hobbs.





#### August 2, 2017 - Long Beach

Standing from left: Deputy District Attorney Kelly Kelley, District Attorney Jackie Lacey and Deputy District Attorneys Simone Shay and Lucrecia Boado. Seated from left: Honorees Patrick Connell, Michael Collier and Sylvester June Board III.

#### April 4, 2018 - Pasadena

Standing from left: Deputy District Attorney Annette Peterson, District Attorney Jackie Lacey and Deputy District Attorneys Jeffrey Megee and Carolina Lugo. Seated from left: Honorees Frank Bañuelos, Leo Richard Anicua and Tracy Richardson.



#### MICHAEL P. NOYES HUMANITARIAN AWARD

The Michael P. Noyes Humanitarian Award was presented to a District Attorney's employee who gave significantly of himself or herself by donating personal time and physical, financial and/or emotional support to help another individual or community in need. The award was named for retired Deputy District Attorney Michael P. Noyes, who in 2001 donated part of his lung to a girl whose life was threatened by cystic fibrosis.



#### Brenda Coleman - 2017

Legal Office Support Assistant Brenda Coleman was recognized for her charitable activities, including serving as a foster parent to nine boys.

"When she sees a problem or a person in need, she does not wait for someone else to help out," said Chief Deputy District Attorney John Spillane, who presented the award. "She realizes that to make a better world, you have to make your world better."



#### **Greg Hernandez - 2018**

Senior Investigator Greg Hernandez received the award for his service in the community, including fostering 23 children.

"It takes great compassion and kindness to be a foster parent," said Assistant District Attorney Joseph Esposito, who presented the award. "To take nearly two dozen children under your wing, as Greg has done, requires a limitless supply of kindness and caring."

#### KEN LAMB DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The Ken Lamb Distinguished Achievement Award was presented to a respected career prosecutor who consistently demonstrated high principles and standards and a commitment to serving as an unwavering advocate for justice. The award recognized the contributions of Deputy District Attorney Ken Lamb, the award's first recipient who died in 2008.



#### Keri Modder - 2017

Deputy District Attorney Keri Modder received the award for her courage to take on challenging cases and her dedication to mentoring younger prosecutors in the office.

"Wherever she has worked, she has been a tremendous resource for those who work around her," said Assistant District Attorney William Hodgman. "Nobody outworks Keri."



#### Brian Kelberg - 2018

Deputy District Attorney Brian Kelberg, who was named the office's capital case coordinator in 2018, was recognized for his brilliant legal mind and mentoring colleagues.

"Brian is absolutely a master of his craft," said Assistant District Attorney William Hodgman, who presented the award.

#### Frank and Jane Jemison Awards

The Frank and Jane Jemison Awards were established in 1979 to recognize an outstanding district attorney investigator and support staff member. The awards were named for the late Frank Jemison, who was a lieutenant in the Bureau of Investigation, and his late wife, Jane, who set up a trust to support these honors.

#### **2017**

**Investigator Award** 



**Mary Cenovich** 

Senior Investigator Mary Cenovich was heralded as a model investigator with extraordinary communication and precise organizational skills that paved the way for successful prosecutions.

"Mary makes everyone around her want to do better and work harder," said Chief John Neu of the Bureau of Investigation. "She is a true professional."

**Support Staff Award** 



Vanessa Rizzo

Paralegal Vanessa Rizzo was recognized for the important work she performed auditing the Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Reporting System.

"We are fortunate to have someone as committed and dedicated as Vanessa on the job and working hard for the children of this county," Assistant District Attorney Pamela Booth said.

2018

**Investigator Award** 



Jenelle Meier

Senior Investigator Jenelle Meier was recognized for her work in the Bureau of Investigation's Administrative Unit, where she took on many assignments to improve the effectiveness of investigators.

"Much of Jenelle's work is not flashy or the stuff that makes headlines, but it is critical for all investigators to do their jobs properly and safely," said Chief John Neu of the Bureau of Investigation.

**Support Staff Award** 



**Belinda Herrera** 

Senior Paralegal Belinda Herrera was honored for her talent in locating criminal history information and training her colleagues on how to track information on prior convictions.

"Belinda works hard to make sure justice is served and that public safety is paramount in Los Angeles County," said Chief Deputy District Attorney John Spillane.

# 2017 Hanna Dreiling Rosa Garcia

#### Volunteers Bring New Skills, Enthusiasm

Indeeds of volunteers, many of them law students, donated their time and talents to the District Attorney's Office annually, saving taxpayers millions of dollars. Each year, two outstanding volunteers are recognized for their hard work and dedication.

#### 2017 Hanna Dreiling and Rosa Garcia

Hanna Dreiling, an Azusa Pacific University graduate, donated 650 hours, assisting the Bureau of Victim Services at its Torrance Branch Office.

There, she offered support to crime victims, many of whom were unfamiliar with legal proceedings, having never set foot in court.

"We're in the criminal justice system and it's so easy to focus on the bad guy and how are we going to hold him or her accountable," she said. "The victim can get lost."

Dreiling and other volunteers, like Rosa Garcia, worked with crime victims to make sure they knew that they had rights that included access to services.

Garcia was a county employee for 33 years, and her interest in helping others, particularly those affected by crime, prompted her to join the 2018







**Benjamin Deuson** 

volunteer ranks in the Bureau of Victim Services.

"Most victims are happy and surprised there's this service and want to have the counseling," Garcia said. "I like that we're helping them to heal."

Garcia volunteered more than 950 hours with the office.

#### 2018

#### Mary Glenn and Benjamin Deuson

Chaplain Mary Glenn was recognized for providing spiritual guidance, emotional support and encouragement to office staff.

"I see people who have demanding roles and jobs, and I want to offer support and care for those who give sacrificially to the community," Glenn said. "If I can alleviate the burden they feel a bit, that's a gift to me."

Benjamin Deuson, a University of LaVerne graduate, brought his technological skills to the office in 2016 and volunteered more than 2,700 hours.

He helped create a cyberattack monitoring mechanism and aided prosecutors so they could quickly sort through electronic records to identify a certain classification of documents.

"It was rewarding to help employees get the information and the facts that they want and need," Deuson said. "I hope that it helps more people down the line."

# Adult Case Filings 2018

## **Criminal Cases Presented to Office**

176,088

Law enforcement personnel investigate crimes and present evidence to deputy district attorneys to determine (1) if a crime has been committed and (2) if there is sufficient evidence to persuade a jury of 12 people that a defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

50,974

**Cases Declined for Criminal Prosecution** 

### Felony Cases Filed

33,695

A felony is a serious crime punishable by a sentence of more than one year in county jail or state prison or, in the most extreme cases, life in state prison or death.

## Misdemeanor Cases Filed

91,419

A misdemeanor is a crime punishable by no more than one year in county jail and, generally, a \$1,000 fine.

#### **Conviction Rate**

74.47%

The percentage of cases in which the defendant was found guilty by a jury or pleaded guilty or no contest to any criminal charge.

#### Reasons for declination include:

26,229 Insufficient Evidence

Deputy district attorneys must establish there is sufficient evidence to support the filing of a criminal case. Without sufficient evidence to prove a case beyond a reasonable doubt, a criminal charge cannot legally or ethically be filed against any person.

#### 8,298 Referred to City Attorney

The District Attorney's Office prosecutes misdemeanors in all areas of Los Angeles County except for the cities of Los Angeles, Long Beach, Pasadena, Santa Monica, Torrance, Burbank, Inglewood, Hawthorne, Redondo Beach and Hermosa Beach. Those cities have their own elected or appointed city attorney/city prosecutor.

#### 4,494 Further Investigation Sought

When there is insufficient evidence to file a criminal case, deputy district attorneys may ask law enforcement personnel to continue their investigation in an effort to collect more evidence that may meet case filing standards.

#### 2,733 Victim Unavailable/Declined to Testify

In some cases, a victim is unwilling or unable to testify against a suspect. If no other evidence exists to prove the case, deputy district attorneys cannot legally or ethically file criminal charges against any person.

#### Management Staff



# Office Locations 2017-2018



**Victim Services** 

33 El Monte





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